

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ATHENS 000351

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [GR](#) [IZ](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [IRAO](#)

SUBJECT: GREECE WELCOMES IRAQ ELECTIONS AS POSITIVE DEVELOPMENT

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Classified By: PolCouns Karen Decker. Reasons 1.4(b/d)

¶1. (C) The Government of Greece (GoG) made statements supporting democratic elections in Iraq on January 26 and again on January 31. In a meeting with Ambassador on January 26, FM Molyviatis called the elections "a manifestation of the will and courage of the Iraqi people," and reiterated Greek support for UNSCR 1546. The Greek media's coverage (reftel) of the elections was generally straightforward, although one major paper said the elections took place under "American occupation." The MFA's spokesperson took heat from reporters after his Jan 26 statement, when journalists questioned Greece's support for the elections in light of widespread ("99 percent") opposition in Greece to coalition activities in Iraq.

¶2. (U) The following statement appeared Jan 31 on the MFA website in Greek and English:

The generally smooth holding - given the particular security conditions - of the first multi-party elections in Iraq in 50 years, as well as the high voting turnout, is a positive development in an environment of great difficulties and problems that urgently need to be effectively confronted. At the same time, however, in accordance with UN Security Council Resolution 1546/2004, yesterday's elections is the first of a series of necessary measures - such as the adoption of a Constitution and the election of a full-term government through elections in 2005 - that must be carried out with success in order to guarantee the smooth transition to a really democratic Iraq. Greece, together with the European Union and the international community, stands by and supports the effort of the friendly people of Iraq, to build their future to the benefit not only of Iraq, but also of peace and stability in the whole region.

¶3. (U) Following Jan 24-25 working-level meetings and Ambassador's discussion with FM Molyviatis on Jan 26, the MFA Spokesman made the following remarks in his Jan 26 press conference:

The Greek government, along with the rest of the international community and our EU partners, is monitoring with particular interest the struggle of the Iraqi people towards the building of a democratic society, and supports the election process of January 30 as an important step towards a better and democratic future. It is the hope of the Greek government that the government produced by the elections of January 30 will be an expression of the will of the Iraqi people regarding the founding of a secure, prosperous, unified and democratic Iraqi state, within the framework of which will be secured the full respect of the human rights of all Iraqis, regardless of race, religion or political orientation, in accordance with the framework, and in the spirit of, the relevant UN resolutions.

¶4. (U) The MFA Spokesman's remarks were not released as a statement and received little press play in Greece in the run-up to the elections. The following Q and A is instructive in setting the scene for how the Iraq issue is viewed by the media in Greece:

-- Journalist:...do you think this (the pre-election period) is really a struggle for democratic elections in Iraq?

-- MFA:...These elections must be a real step towards a better and more democratic future for the country, and it is as such a step that the Greek government sees them.

-- Journalist: (off microphone) Yes, but 99 percent of Greek people disagree. Isn't that cause for concern? They disagree with the position you just stated.

-- MFA:...I cannot be an interpreter of the views of the Greek people, but I don't think that there should be, and I don't think that there is, objection to a wish. That is, for the upcoming elections to constitute a step towards something better. Is there anyone who says that the elections are a step in the wrong direction?

-- Journalist: You made a statement essentially supporting the elections. You said that the Greek government supports the elections as an important step. Are you sure that these

elections, being held under U.S. occupation, with torture, etc., are an important step?

-- MFA: I repeat the relevant section of my statement: "It is our hope that the government resulting from the elections of January 30 . . ." It is the expression of a wish - a sincere wish. I think that we all understand each other here. The upcoming elections are a step in Iraq's history. No one can deny this. We hope that this step will be a step of progress that will lead to something better. If someone believes that it should be a step towards something worse, it would surprise and puzzle me as a position.

15. (C) COMMENT: In spite of the Greek public's hostility towards coalition activities in Iraq, the GoG found a way to make supportive statements both before and after the elections. Some of the impetus for this decision comes from combined U.S. and Iraqi efforts in Athens (there is a new and energetic Iraqi ambassador in town now). Greece also now has an ambassador in Baghdad, who (we are told) is in daily communication with the MFA. We see this a good first step, laying the groundwork for Greek participation in multilateral activities in Iraq in the future.